

## CHAPTER 21

### *Al-Anbiyâ': The Prophets*

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 7 sections; 112 verses)

This chapter deals more with the deliverance of the righteous than the punishment of the wicked, more with the triumph of truth than the annihilation of falsehood, though the one no doubt implies the other. While it is devoted in part to general statements regarding the deliverance of the prophets, and the ultimate triumph of their cause, and hence goes under the name of *The Prophets*, the history of Ibrâhîm is particularly referred to, as is that of Mûsâ in the last.

The chapter begins with the certainty of the punishment of the opponents and is followed by a clear declaration that the judgment approaches and the reckoning are nigh. We are then told that Truth must triumph now, as it has always done, and this is shown in the second section. The third draws attention to the truth of revelation in general and the revelation of the Prophet in particular. The fourth calls attention to the predominance of mercy in the Divine nature, for merciful dealing was specially to mark the punishment of the Holy Prophet's opponents, and in this respect Ibrâhîm was to be his prototype, whose history forms the subject-matter of the next section. The sixth shows how prophets have always been delivered from the hands of their enemies in the most critical circumstances, and the last adds that the righteous will be made to inherit the land and Truth will ultimately prevail. As regards the date of its revelation, see the introductory note on chapter 17.

### SECTION 1: **Judgment approaches**

In the name of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

**1** Their reckoning draws nigh to people, and they turn away in heedlessness.

**2** There comes not to them a new Reminder from their *Rabb* but they hear it while they sport,

**3** Their hearts trifling. And they — the wrongdoers — counsel in secret: He is nothing but a mortal like yourselves; will you then yield to enchantment while you see?

**4** He said: My *Rabb* knows (every) utterance in the heaven and the earth, and He is the Hearer, the Knower.

**5** Nay, say they: Medleys of dreams! Nay, he has forged it! Nay, he is a poet! So let him bring to us a sign such as the former (prophets) were sent (with).<sup>a</sup>

**6** Not a town believed before them, which We destroyed: will they then believe?<sup>a</sup>

**7** And We sent not before you (i.e. Muḥammad) any but men to whom We sent revelation; so ask the followers of the Reminder if you know not.

**5a.** The Quraish seem to have been quite puzzled — and hostile critics of the Qur’ân are still puzzled — what they could liken the Qur’ân to. They first call it *sihr*, i.e., *skilful eloquence* (*Tâj al-‘Arûs* (Dictionary), by *Imâm Muḥibb al-Dîn Abu-l-Faïd Murtaḍâ*), because, notwithstanding their opposition to it, it had an attraction for them. But then there are prophecies which mere eloquence cannot produce, so they call it *medleys of dreams*. Then they think that there is a settled purpose therein, by reason of its asserting the Prophet’s triumph and the discomfiture of his powerful enemies, so they call it an intentional *forgery*; and lastly, as if to devise one word combining all these, they call him a *poet*. Then they demand a sign the like of which was given to the former prophets, meaning their destruction, because the Qur’ân had repeatedly called their attention to the fate of those who had rejected the truth before them.

**6a.** They are told in reply that persistence in wickedness and disbelief has always been punished with destruction.

**8** Nor did We give them bodies not eating food, nor did they abide.<sup>a</sup>

**9** Then We made Our promise good to them; so We delivered them and whom We pleased, and We destroyed the extravagant.

**10** Certainly We have revealed to you a Book which will give you eminence. Do you not then understand?<sup>a</sup>

## SECTION 2: **Truth has always Triumphed**

**11** And how many a town which was iniquitous did We demolish, and We raised up after it another people!

**12** So when they felt Our might, lo! they began to flee from it.

**13** Flee not and return to the easy lives which you led, and to your dwellings, that you may be questioned.

**14** They said: O woe to us! Surely we were unjust.

**15** And this cry of theirs ceased not till We made them cut off, extinct. <sup>a</sup>

**8a.** Thus every prophet had a mortal body needing food for its support, and every one of them tasted of death. Therefore “Jesus” also must have had a body which stood in need of food and must have tasted of death. The idea that he is alive is clearly opposed to this verse.

**10a.** Whenever the opponents demand that the threatened punishment should come, the reply always is that the Qur’ân is a blessing and a mercy for them. The same truth is expressed here. They demand a sign like that of former prophets, but they are told that the Qur’ân has been revealed to make them a great and eminent nation in the world. *Dhikr* means *eminence, fame, renown, honour* as well as *reminder* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). Also see 2:152 and 38:1, for this meaning of *dhikr*.

**15a.** The metaphor in *hasîd*, *cut off*, is taken from seed-produce, which is reaped, and in *khâmid*, *extinct*, from fire which is extinguished, and the ashes of which are left smouldering. The above verses contain a clear warning for the opponents.

**16** And We created not the heaven and the earth and what is between them for sport.<sup>a</sup>

**17** Had We wished to take a pastime, We would have taken it from before Ourselves; by no means would We do (so).<sup>a</sup>

**18** Nay, We hurl the Truth against falsehood, so it knocks out its brains, and lo! it vanishes.<sup>a</sup> And woe to you for what you describe!

**19** And to Him belongs whoever is in the *samâwât* and the earth. And those who are with Him are not too proud to serve Him, nor are they weary.

**20** They glorify (Him) night and day: they flag not.

**21** Or have they taken gods from the earth who give life?

**22** If there were in them deities besides Allâh, they would both have been in disorder. So glory be to Allâh, the *Rabb* of the Throne, being above what they describe!<sup>a</sup>

**16a.** It is a continuance of the warning given in the previous verses. They were made to witness signs of the truth of the Prophet and they are now told to bear in mind that these signs were not in vain. In nature every cause has an effect and every end is achieved by means. Life must be taken seriously, not as a jest.

**17a.** The *in* is here *nâfiyah*, i.e., negating the statement already made (“by no means”). Pastime, *lahw*, in this verse carries the same significance as *sporting* in the previous verse. The commentators say that *lahw*, in the dialect of Yaman, signifies *wife* or *child*, and thus the statement made in the verse is a refutation of the Christian doctrine that “Jesus Christ” is the son of God (*Jâmi‘ al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur’ân* (Commentary), by Imâm Abû Ja‘far Muḥammad *ibn Jarîr al-Tabarî*).

**18a.** Mark the deep conviction of the Prophet as to the ultimate triumph of Truth in the world. Certainly Truth had dawned on his mind in full resplendence. The forces of darkness and falsehood, which were uppermost in Arabia when these words were uttered, were brought to naught in his lifetime and, however powerful they may appear to be, they cannot even today make a stand before the onward march of Truth.

**22a.** There is order in the universe because one law pervades the whole of it, and one law clearly points to one Author and Maintainer of that law. The unity of law is a clear proof of the Unity of the Maker.

Note that here Allâh is spoken of as *Rabb al-‘Arsh*, the Nourisher unto perfection (“*Rabb*”) of the ‘*Arsh*, so that the ‘*Arsh*, or the Throne itself is sustained by Allâh, and it is not Allâh Who is sustained by the ‘*Arsh*.

**23** He cannot be questioned as to what He does, and they will be questioned.

**24** Or, have they taken deities besides Him? Say, ‘Bring your proof. This is the reminder of those with me, and the reminder of those before me.<sup>a</sup> Nay, most of them know not the Truth, so they turn away.

**25** And We sent no messenger before you but We revealed to him that there is no Deity but Me, so serve Me.

**26** And they say: The Beneficent has taken to Himself a son. Glory be to Him! Nay, they are honoured servants — <sup>a</sup>

**27** They speak not before He speaks, and according to His command they act. <sup>a</sup>

**28** He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they intercede not except for him whom He approves, and for fear of Him they tremble.

**24a.** The great and fundamental truth of the Unity of Allâh is common to all religions; no prophet ever taught polytheism.

**26a.** Refuting the Christian doctrine that “Jesus Christ” is the son of God, it is added that *they are honoured servants* – meaning all the messengers of Allâh including ‘Îsâ. The words draw our attention to the fact that others besides “Jesus” were spoken of as the sons of God, but that the title signified nothing more than that they were honoured servants, and that therefore “Jesus” was the son of God exactly in the same sense.

**27a.** This verse affords a conclusive testimony for the sinlessness of prophets. In the first place they speak not till Allâh has spoken, i.e., they speak according to what He has taught them, not speaking of their own accord. And secondly, when they act, they act according to His commandment. Thus both their words and deeds are in accordance with Divine will, and therefore sin or disobedience of Allâh cannot be attributed to them. The context shows clearly that the verse speaks of prophets, and not of *malâ’ikah*.

**29** And whoever of them should say, I am a deity besides Him, such a one We recompense with hell. Thus We reward the unjust.

### SECTION 3: Truth of Revelation

**30** Do not those who disbelieve see that the *samâwât* and the earth were closed up, so We rent them.<sup>a</sup> And We made from water everything living.<sup>b</sup> Will they not then believe?

**31** And We made firm mountains in the earth lest it be convulsed with them, and We made in it wide ways that they might follow a right direction.<sup>a</sup>

**32** And We have made the *samâ'* a guarded canopy; yet they turn away from its signs.<sup>a</sup>

**30a.** The *samâwât* and the earth may stand here for the whole universe. Or for the solar system in particular, which has developed out of a nebular mass. And the *fatq* or *separation* may refer to the starry creation or to the throwing off of the planets of the solar system - and also the great symmetry of its arrangement and the motions of the various bodies in the *samâwât*. There is a reference to the orbits of the various planets further on in verse 33. But there may also be a deeper allusion in the *closing up* of the *samâwât*. And the earth to the cessation of Divine revelation for a time before the advent of the Holy Prophet, which was marked by the absence of a prophet in the world for six hundred years and the prevalence of corruption all over the world. The opening up of the heavens and the earth would in this case signify the coming of revelation, which brought life to the world. In physical nature too, rain opens up the earth.

**30b.** While this statement reveals a remarkable truth in the physical world, a truth which science has established only recently. And which was not known to the world generally at the time of the Prophet. Namely, *that water is the source of all life*, it draws attention to the equally remarkable religious truth that it is only by Divine revelation, which is again and again compared with water in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân, that life is given to a world otherwise dead in sin and corruption.

**31a.** Compare 16:15, where nearly the same words occur. Another significance of the first part of the verse is *We made firm mountains in the earth that they might be a source of benefit to you*. Compare 79:32, 33; also see 1358. In the latter part there may be a deeper reference to the ways pointed out by prophets among every nation.

**32a.** Arabia had its spiritualists, the astrologers and the diviners who pretended to have access to the secrets of *samâ'*, for a full explanation of which see 2530. They are told that they cannot have any such access. Or, the meaning is that revelation from Allâh (called here *samâ'*) is guarded against all attacks.

**33** And He it is Who created the night and the day and the sun and the moon. All float in orbits.

**34** And We granted abiding forever to no mortal before you. If you die, will they abide?

**35** Every *nafs* must taste of death. And We test you by evil and good by way of trial. And to Us you are returned.<sup>a</sup>

**36** And when those who disbelieve see you, they treat you not but with mockery: Is this he who speaks of your deities? And they deny when the Beneficent (Allâh) is mentioned.<sup>a</sup>

**37** human beings are created of haste.<sup>a</sup> Soon will I show you My signs, so ask Me not to hasten them.

**38** And they say: When will this threat come to pass, if you are truthful?<sup>a</sup>

**39** If those who disbelieve but knew the time when they will not be able to ward off the fire from their faces, nor from their backs, and they will not be helped!

**35a.** They were afflicted with small evils, and the removal of these again brought to them a turn of good events. All this was by way of trial; the greater punishment, which was to bring about the final overthrow of their power, was yet in store for them.

**36a.** The Arabs, being an idolatrous people, would not, like the Christians, call Allâh by the name *al-Rahmân* (see also 25:60); hence the Beneficent (Allâh) is here spoken of in contrast with the idols.

**37a.** So prominent is the characteristic of haste in human beings that they may be said to have been created, as it were, of haste. The expression is explained by what follows: *Soon will I show you My signs, so ask Me not to hasten them.*

**38a.** The particular sign, which they again and again demanded was that a destructive punishment like that, which overtook former people, should overtake them.

**40** Nay, it will come to them all of a sudden and confound them, so they will not have the power to avert it, nor will they be respited.

**41** And messengers before thee were indeed mocked, so there befell those of them who scoffed, that whereat they scoffed.<sup>a</sup>

#### SECTION 4: Allâh deals with human beings mercifully

**42** Say: Who guards you by night and by day from the Beneficent? <sup>A</sup> Nay, they turn away at the mention of their *Rabb*.

**43** Or, have they gods who can defend them against Us? They cannot help themselves, nor can they be defended from Us.

**44** Nay, We gave provision to these and their fathers, until life was prolonged to them. See they not then that We are visiting the land, curtailing it of its sides? Can they then prevail?

**45** Say: I warn you only by revelation; and the deaf hear not the call when they are warned.

**46** And if a blast of the chastisement of thy *Rabb* were to touch them, they would say: O woe to us! Surely we were unjust.

**47** And We will set up a just balance on the day of Resurrection, so no *nafs* (no one) will be wronged in the least. And if there be the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We will bring it. And Sufficient are We to take account.



**41a.** The rejectors of truth have always scoffed at the idea of being punished. This and the two preceding verses assert in the most forcible words that Truth will finally triumph.

**42a.** That is, were it not that Allâh were Beneficent to you and guarded you, there is none who could guard you. Or if He, notwithstanding His beneficence, were to punish you because of your persistence in evil to such a degree as to call for the wrath of even a Beneficent Master, there would be none to guard you against that punishment.

**48** And certainly We gave Mûsâ and Hârûn the criterion and a light and a reminder for those who keep from evil,<sup>a</sup>

**49** Who fear their *Rabb* in secret and they are fearful of the Hour.

**50** And this is a blessed Reminder, which We have revealed. Will you then deny it?

## SECTION 5: Ibrâhîm is Delivered

**51** And certainly We gave Ibrâhîm his rectitude before, and We knew him well. <sup>a</sup>

**52** When he said to his sire and his people, ‘What are these images to whose worship you cleave?’

**53** They said, ‘We found our fathers worshipping them.’

**54** He said: Certainly you have been, you and your fathers, in manifest error.

**55** They said: Have you brought us the truth, or are you of the jesters?

**48a.** The criterion given to Mûsâ was that he was delivered from the hands of a most powerful enemy. The last verse of the section predicts that a similar sign would be shown in the case of the Prophet.

**51a.** The history of Ibrâhîm is contained in various chapters of the Arabic Glorious Qur’ân, the different portions supplementing each other, there being very little repetition. The following is a complete list of all references to him: 2:124–132, 133, 135, 136, 140, 258, 260; 3:65 – 68, 84; 4:125; 6:74 – 84; 9:114; 11:69 – 76; 12: 6; 14:35 – 41; 15:51– 60; 16:120–123; 19:41– 49; 21:51–72; 22:26 –29;

26:69–89; 29:16, 17, 24–27; 37:83– 113; 38:45, 46; 43:26–28; 51:24–34; 57:26; 60:4.

**56** He said: Nay, your *Rabb* is the *Rabb* of the *samâwât* and the earth, Who created them; and I am of those who bear witness to this.

**57** And, by Allâh! I will certainly plan against your idols after you go away, turning your backs.

**58** So he broke them into pieces, except the chief of them, that haply they might return to it. <sup>a</sup>

**59** They said, ‘Who has done this to our deities? Surely he is one of the unjust.

**60** They said, ‘We heard a youth, who is called Ibrâhîm, speak of them.

**61** They said, ‘Then bring him before the people’s eyes, perhaps they may bear witness.

**62** They said: Have you done this to our deities, O Ibrâhîm?

**63** He said: Surely (someone) has done it. The chief of them is this; so ask them, if they can speak.<sup>a</sup>

**58a.** The story of Abraham’s breaking the idols is related in Jewish Rabbinical literature, Genesis R 38, and Tauna Debe Eliyahu 2:25 (*Jewish Encyclopaedia*).

**63a.** Note that there is a pause after the words *bal fa’ala-hû*, and the statement *kabîru-hum hâdhâ* is an independent statement. *Fa’ala-hû* thus means some *doer has done it* (*Al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr* (Commentary), by Imâm Fakhr al-Dîn Râzî). The word *bal* is not necessarily a particle of digression, implying the negation of what precedes it, often denoting no more than *and* or *surely*. Thus the *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane says: “Sometimes it is used to denote the passing from one subject to another without cancelling what precedes it and is synonymous with *wâw*, as in the saying in the Qur’ân, 85:20, 21”. The other passage, *kabîru-hum hâdhâ*, being an independent statement, means *the chief of them is this*, because it was left unbroken by Ibrâhîm. Then follows the statement: *so ask them, if they can speak*. Ask the idols, they were told. They were taken as deities who could benefit their worshippers, or harm others, yet they were not able to help themselves. They were shattered to pieces, yet they could do no harm to

their shatterer. Nor could they even tell their votaries who was responsible for this. It should be further noted that Abraham never tried to conceal what he had done. In fact, before breaking the idols he had warned the people that he would plan against their idols; see verse 57. This he declared publicly when carrying on a controversy with them. The object of sparing the chief idol was, as made clear in verse 58 that *haply they might return to it*. The chief was yet safe, they should have argued within themselves, why not pray to him to find out who broke the others. This is hinted at in verse 64, where they are made to confess their own wrongdoing in worshipping things, which could do them no good, or evil. See also the verses that follow.

**64** Then they turned to themselves and said: Surely you yourselves are wrongdoers;

**65** Then they were made to hang down their heads,<sup>a</sup> ‘You know indeed that they speak not.

**66** He said: Serve you then besides Allâh what does you no good, nor harms you?

**67** Fie on you and on what you serve besides Allâh! Have you no sense?

**68** They said: Burn him, and help your deities, if you are going to do (anything).

**69** We said: O fire, be coolness and peace for Ibrâhîm:<sup>a</sup>

**70** And they intended a plan against him, but We made them the greater losers.<sup>a</sup>

**65a.** *They were made to hang down their heads* on account of shame, for their deities proved so helpless as to be unable to name even the person who did them injury.

**69a.** The fire was turned into *coolness* and *peace* for Ibrâhîm. There are many stories related in the commentaries as to the size of this fire and the time Ibrâhîm remained therein. Reliable commentators, however, do not accept them as they are baseless. “There are many versions of this story, but according to *Bahr al-Muhîṭ* many stories have been fabricated in relating what happened to Ibrâhîm, while the truth is only what Allâh has stated” (*Rûḥ al-Ma’ânî* (Commentary), by Abu-l-Faḍl Shahâb al-Dîn al-Sayyid Mahmûd al-Alûsî). The Arabic Glorious Qur’ân does not state anywhere that Ibrâhîm was actually cast into a fire. His opponents had no

doubt decided to *burn him*, as stated here, or *to slay him or burn him* (29:24). But here in verse 70 as well as in 37:98, we are told in clear words that *they intended a plan against him but We made them the greater losers* (verse 70), or *We brought them low* (37:98). This shows that their plan was ineffective. According to 29:24, Allâh delivered him from the fire, before being thrown into or after being thrown into it, it does not say. Verse 71 states that the delivery was brought about by means of a journey to another land. It was thus a *flight* to another place like the Prophet's Flight to Madînah, and in the history of Ibrâhîm there is a deeper reference to the history of the Prophet himself.

**70a.** According to the Biblical account of Abraham, the patriarch undertook successful expeditions against Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and his confederate kings. Rabbinical literature also gives the names of certain kings whom Abraham defeated.

**71** And We delivered him and Lût (directing them) to the land, which We had blessed for the nations.

**72** And We gave him Ishâq; and Ya'qûb, a son's son. And We made (them) all good.

**73** And We made them leaders who guided (people) by Our command, and We revealed to them the doing of good and the keeping up of prayer and the giving of alms, and Us (alone) they served;

**74** And to Lût We gave wisdom and knowledge, and We delivered him from the town which wrought abomination. Surely they were an evil people, transgressors;

**75** And We admitted him to Our mercy; surely he was of the righteous.

## SECTION 6: Allâh always delivers Prophets

**76** And Nûh, when he cried aforetime, so We answered him, and delivered him and his people from the great calamity.

**77** And We helped him against the people who rejected Our messages. Surely they were an evil people, so We drowned them all.

**78** And Dâwûd and Sulaimân, when they gave judgment concerning the field, when the people's sheep strayed therein by night, and We were bearers of witness to their judgment.

**79** So We made Sulaimân to understand it. And to each (of them) We gave wisdom and knowledge. And We made the mountains, declaring (Our) glory, and the birds,<sup>a</sup> subservient to Dâwûd. And We were the Doers.

**80** And We taught him the making of coats of mail for you, to protect you in your wars; will you then be grateful?<sup>a</sup>

**81** And to Sulaimân (We subdued) the wind blowing violent, pursuing its course by His command to the land which We had blessed, and We are ever Knower of all things.<sup>a</sup>

**82** And of the *shayâtîn* there were those who dived for him and did other work besides that; and We kept guard over them:<sup>a</sup>

**83** And Ayyûb, when he cried to his *Rabb*: Distress has afflicted me! And You are the most Merciful of those who show mercy.

**79a.** Elsewhere it is stated that everything that exists in the *samâwât* or the earth is made of service to human beings (45:13). And on various occasions it is mentioned that the rivers, the sea, the sun and the moon, night and day, etc., are made of service to human beings (16:12, 14; 13:2, etc.). This explains the meaning of making mountains and birds of service to Dâwûd. A thing is made, for service to a human being, when he or she can use it to his or her advantage. Note further that everything in the *samâwât* and the earth declares the glory of Allâh (17:44). But see 34:10a, where a similar statement occurs and is shown to refer to the conquests of Dâwûd. For other references to Dâwûd see 2:251; 4:163; 5:78; 6:84; 27:15, 16; 34:10–13; 38:17–30.

**80a.** It is not here stated that the making of coats of mail was not known before Dâwûd. He had to fight many battles and against very strong enemies, and there is no doubt that in these battles he had to equip the armies of Israel in the best possible manner. See further 34:10b, 11a.

**81a.** For other references to Sulaimân see 2:102; 4:163; 6:84; 27:15– 44; 34:12 – 14; 38:30– 40. Sulaimân’s feet did him an important service, and this is what is meant by the wind being made subservient to Sulaimân. According to Biblical history, “with the Phoenicians he united in maritime commerce, sending out a feet once in three years from Ezion-geber, at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba, to Ophir, presumably on the eastern coast of the Arabian peninsula. From this distant port and others on the way he derived fabulous amounts of gold and tropical products. These revenues gave him almost unlimited means for increasing the glory of his capital city and palace and for the perfection of his civil and military organization” (Jewish Encyclopaedia). Also compare 14:32: “And He has made the ships subservient to you, to run their course in the sea by His command”.

**82a.** Elsewhere we have: “And the devils, every builder and diver, and others fettered in chains” (38:37, 38). Sulaimân employed foreigners, whom he had subdued, to do the work of divers and builders. The word *shaitân* signifies *one who is excessively proud, rebellious or audacious*, whether a man or a jinn or a beast (Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane). See further 38:38a.

**84** So We responded to him and removed the distress he had, and We gave him his people and the like of them with them: a mercy from Us and a reminder to the worshippers.<sup>a</sup>

**85** And Ismâ‘îl and Idrîs and Dhu-l-Kifl; all were of the patient ones;<sup>a</sup>

**86** And We admitted them to Our mercy; surely they were of the good ones.

**87** And Dhu-l-Nûn,<sup>a</sup> when he went away in wrath,<sup>b</sup> and he thought that We would not straiten him,<sup>c</sup> so he called out among afflictions:<sup>d</sup> There is no Deity but You, glory be to You! Surely I am of the sufferers of loss. <sup>e</sup>

**84a.** Ayyûb is again mentioned after Sulaimân in greater detail in the 38th chapter, verses 41– 44. There also he is spoken of as being given *his people (ahl) and the like of them with them*. There, however, we have clear indications that the distress spoken of here relates to some journey, which he undertook in connection with the mission with which he was entrusted. As a result of this journey he lost, or was separated from, his people. It seems that he had to flee to some place of safety, and

he ultimately found not only his own people but also others like them, i.e., he had other believers in him in his place of refuge. The story of Ayyûb as given in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân has, in fact, nothing in common with the lengthy book of Job in the Bible. It is really a prophetic statement relating to the Prophet's own Flight from Makkah to Madînah, where he met with not only his Makkan followers but also believers in Madînah in about the same number. See further 38:41a, 42a, 43a.

**85a.** *Dhu-l-Kifl* literally means *one having a portion that would suffice* (*Al-Mufradât fî Gharîb al-Qur'ân* (Dictionary of Qur'ân), by Shaikh Abu-l-Qâsim Al-Husain *al-Râghib al-Isfahânî*). The commentators differ in identifying him with one of the Biblical prophets, Zacharias, Elias, or Joshua (*Al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr* (Commentary), by Imâm Fakhr al-Dîn Râzî). Rodwell states, on the authority of *Travels* of Niebuhr, that the Arabs call Ezekiel by the name of *Kifl*. The suggestion, therefore, that by *Dhu-l-Kifl* is meant the prophet Ezekiel, is more sound. This prophet is mentioned only once again, as here without any reference to his history, in 38:48.

**87a.** *Dhu-l-Nûn* is another name for Yûnus, the Arabic equivalent of the latter being *Yûnus*, by which name the prophet is mentioned in 6:86, 10:98, and 37:139. *Nûn* means *a big fish* (*Al-Mufradât fî Gharîb al-Qur'ân* (Dictionary of Qur'ân), by Shaikh Abu-l-Qâsim Al-Husain *al-Râghib al-Isfahânî*), and *Dhu-l-Nûn* therefore means *lord of the fish*. In a very early revelation, Yûnus is spoken of as the *companion of the fish* (68:48). Both these titles seem to be taken from the incident of the fish, for an explanation of which see 37:142a.

**87b.** Here we are told that Yûnus went away in wrath, and evidently what is meant is that he was wroth with his people and left them for another place. A prophet's being angry with Allâh is simply unimaginable. Moreover he is spoken of here as *going away*, while no human could think of going away from the presence of the Omnipresent. He was wroth with his people because of their stubbornness, says Râzî. See also 37:140a.

**87c.** It is wrong to translate the words *lan naqdira 'alai-hi* as meaning *We had no power over him*. "It cannot be from *al-qudrah* (meaning *power* or *ability*); for he who thinks this is an unbeliever". The meaning is, *And he thought that We would*

*not straiten him* or *We would not decree against him* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). In the Qur'ân itself, the same word is used in the sense of straitening. See 13:26, where *wa yaqdiru* means *He straitens* (provision), and also 65:7, where *qudira* means *straitened*. Finding his people stubborn, he went away from them and was wroth with them and *thought*, or rather *knew* (*ẓanna*), that some way would be opened for him to bring people to guidance somewhere.

**88** So We responded to him and delivered him from grief. And thus do We deliver the believers.

**89** And Zakariyyâ, when he cried to his *Rabb*: My *Rabb*, leave me not alone! and You are the Best of inheritors. <sup>a</sup>

**90** So We responded to him and gave him Yahyâ and made his wife fit for him. <sup>a</sup> Surely they used to vie, one with another, in good deeds and called upon Us, hoping and fearing; and they were humble before Us.

**91** And she who guarded her chastity,<sup>a</sup> so We **breathed into her** of Our inspiration, and made her and her son a sign for the nations.

**87d.** *Zulumât al-bahr* signifies *calamities* or *hardships of the sea* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane); and difficulty is compared to *darkness* because of the inability of a man to find his way when in difficulty, as when in darkness.

**87e.** The word *ẓulm* primarily signifies *al naqs* (as meaning *the making to suffer loss or detriment*) (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). In the Qur'ân (18:33), gardens are spoken of as *yielding their fruits* and *they failed not* (*lam tazlim*) in ought thereof, where *ẓulm* means simply *failure*. Originally *ẓulm* is “*putting a thing in a place not its own, putting it in a wrong place, misplacing it, and it is by exceeding or by falling short*” (*Al-Mufradât fî Gharîb al-Qur'ân* (Dictionary of Qur'ân), by *Shaikh* Abu-l-Qâsim Al-Husain al-Râghib al-Isfahânî, *Tâj al-'Arûs* (Dictionary), by *Imâm Muhibb al-Dîn Abu-l-Faiḍ Murtaḍâ*, *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). *Zalama* also means *he imposed upon him a thing that was above his power or ability* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane), and in this sense the word is used sometimes in a good sense when a man imposes upon himself a heavy duty to please Allâh. It is in this



sense that Jonah is here spoken of as being of the *ẓâlimîn*, in the sense of *making himself suffer a loss* by going away from his original place. Or of having failed in doing justice to the message with which he was entrusted, or in any of the other senses explained above. It should be borne in mind also that the word *ẓulm* may mean anything from the slightest falling off from one's duty to the greatest transgression.

**89a.** That is, One Who will remain after all have perished.

**90a.** By *fitness* is meant fitness to bear a child, because she was thought to be barren.

**91a.** Nothing is said about Immaculate Conception here. The *guarding of chastity* does not preclude the lawful union of husband and wife; for the meaning of *furûj*, see 23:5a.

**92** Surely this, your community is a single community, and I am your *Rabb*, so serve Me. <sup>a</sup>

**93** And they cut off their affair among them: to Us will all return.

## SECTION 7: The Righteous will inherit the Land

**94** So whoever does good deeds and is a believer, there is no rejection of his effort, and We surely write (it) down for him.

**95** And it is forbidden to a town which We destroy: they shall not return.<sup>a</sup>

**96** Even<sup>a</sup> when Gog and Magog are let loose and they sally forth from every elevated place.<sup>b</sup>

**92a.** The basic principle of all religions taught by the prophets has been one and the same in all ages and all countries that Allâh is the *Rabb* of all and He alone must be served. Therefore all prophets are here declared to be one community; they all led people to virtue through service to Allâh. But, as the next verse shows, their followers broke off this unity.

**95a.** By *qaryah*, i.e., *town*, here are meant *ahl qaryah*, i.e., the 'people of a town.' The ordinary meaning of *harâm* is *forbidden*, and the significance of the first part

of the verse is that their returning to life is forbidden, the words *they shall not return* being explanatory. But some commentators, including ‘Abd Allâh ibn ‘Abbâs (Companion), have explained *harâm* as meaning *wâjib* or *binding*, and a verse of the pre-Islâmic days is also quoted in support of this (*Al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr* (Commentary), by Imâm Fakhr al-Dîn Râzî). The verse reveals the great truth that those who are made to taste of death are not sent back into this world. A saying of the Holy Prophet is also reported according to which Jâbir, son of ‘Abd Allâh, was informed by the Prophet that his father, ‘Abd Allâh, who was slain in a battle with the enemies of Islâm, on being asked by the Almighty what he desired most, expressed a wish to go back into the world and be slain again in the cause of Truth, but received the reply that this could not be, for “the word has gone forth from Me that *they shall not return*” (*Sunan* (Hadîth), by Abû ‘Abd Allâh Muḥammad ibn Yazîd *ibn Mâjah* al-Qazwînî 24:15), where the concluding words are evidently the concluding words of this verse. Therefore both the Qur’ân and the Hadîth settle conclusively that no one who is dead returns to life in this world.

**96a.** The previous verse contains a prohibition against the return to life of those who are dead, or the rise of nations that are once destroyed. This one points out that even Gog and Magog, notwithstanding their predominance in the whole world, will follow the same law. For *hattâ*, meaning *even*, see *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane, who quotes *Mughnî al-Labîb* (Grammar), by Al-Shaikh Jamâl al-Dîn ibn Hishâm Al-Ansârî.

**97** And the True Promise draws nigh, then lo! The eyes of those who disbelieve will be fixedly open: O woe to us! Surely we were heedless of this; nay, we were unjust.<sup>a</sup>

**98** Surely you and what you worship besides Allâh are fuel of hell; to it you will come.<sup>a</sup>

**99** Had these been gods, they would not have come to it. And all will abide therein.

**100** For them therein is groaning and therein they hear not.<sup>a</sup>

**101** Those for whom the good has already gone forth from Us, they will be kept far off from it<sup>a</sup> —

**102** They will not hear the faintest sound of it and they will abide in that which their inner-selves (*nafs*) desire.<sup>a</sup>

**96b.** For Gog and Magog, see 18:94a and 96a, where this verse has also been explained in connection with the crumbling of the barrier, which was made to withhold the depredations of Gog and Magog. The words *they sally forth from every elevated place* mean that they will take possession of every point of vantage and convenience, so as to dominate the whole world. The same idea is expressed in the Hadîth in different words, for which see 18:98a

**97a.** The *True Promise* that draws nigh with the domination of Gog and Magog is the promise of the ultimate triumph of Truth: “He it is Who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the *Dîn of Truth* (i.e., the way of life as prescribed by Allâh, of the Truth) that He may make it prevail over all other ways of life” (9:33). This is also referred to in 18:99, after speaking of the great conflict of Gog and Magog, in the words *then We shall gather them all together*; see 18:99a. Thus the time when Gog and Magog overcome the whole world is also the time when Truth will gain ground and prevail over the whole earth. Materialism would first spread over the whole world, but would prove a failure. Then would religious Truth shine and people would feel that they had not only been heedless to it, but even unjust in trying to suppress it.

**98a.** Compare 18:100: “And We shall bring forth hell, exposed to view, on that day before the disbelievers”; see 1525a.

**100a.** Those who turn a deaf ear to the Truth here shall be raised deaf in the life after death, and therefore they do not hear.

**101a.** This verse totally refutes the false ideas that the righteous will first go to hell. They will not even hear its faintest sound, as the next verse states.

**102a.** It is the bliss of communion with the Divine Being which the inner-self (*nafs*) of the righteous long for, so it is that bliss in which they shall live in the Hereafter.

**103** The great Terror will not grieve them and the *malâ'ikah* will meet them: This is your day which you were promised.

**104** The day when We roll up *samâ'* like the rolling up of the scroll of writings. As We began the first creation, We shall reproduce it. A promise (binding) on Us. We shall bring it about.<sup>a</sup>

**105** And certainly We wrote in the Book after the reminder that My righteous servants will inherit the land.<sup>a</sup>

**106** Surely in this is a message for a people who serve (Us).

**107** And We have not sent thee but as a mercy to the nations.<sup>a</sup>

**108** Say: It is only revealed to me that your Deity is one Deity: will you then submit?

**109** But if they turn back, say: I have warned you in fairness, and I know not whether that which you are promised is near or far.

**110** Surely He knows what is spoken openly and He knows what you hide.

**111** And I know not if this may be a trial for you and a provision till a time.

**112** He said: My *Rabb*, judge You with truth. And our *Rabb* is the Beneficent, Whose help is sought against what you ascribe (to Him).

**104a.** Several statements are made in this verse. The first is the *rolling up of the samâ'* like a written scroll. This means that the old order will be swept away altogether, just as when a writing is finished, it is rolled up. This no doubt happened in Arabia at the appearance of the Holy Prophet. The old order was entirely gone and a new civilization had taken its place. The thoroughness of the transformation, in all fields of human activity, as brought about by the Prophet, is a fact now universally admitted. But then follows the statement: *As We began the first creation, We shall reproduce it.* The sweeping away of the old order no doubt meant that a new order would be created. This is the *first creation* referred to here — the bringing about of a new order at the Prophet's appearance. And then we are told that the new order will be reproduced again. This reproduction is in reference to what has been stated in the first part of the section — that Gog and Magog will dominate the whole world, and thus they would overcome even Islâm. The religious resuscitation to which Islâm gave rise would thus receive a set-back by the predominance of a material outlook of the world through the prevalence of Gog and Magog, but this set-back, we are here told, would be only temporary, and

a religious awakening like the first religious awakening would then be brought about in the whole world. This statement is followed by the words: *A Promise binding on Us*. The promise of the ultimate triumph of Truth in the whole world is of frequent occurrence in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân in earlier as well as in later revelation, and the temporary set-back indicated here is also frequently mentioned, and on one occasion at least it is made fully clear that it will be a set-back extending over a thousand years (32:5); see 1959.

**105a.** The Qur'ân had repeatedly warned the disbelievers that Islâm would be made triumphant in the land, and the righteous servants who were made to suffer persecution would one day be masters of the land. The words also contain a prophecy of the possession of the Holy Land by the Muslims, which was fulfilled in the caliphate of 'Umar. Compare Psalms 37:29. But as already noted, it is of the whole world that the Qur'ân is speaking and we are here told that Truth will ultimately triumph in the whole world, which would thus be inherited by the righteous. This is made clear in verse 107.

**107a.** While the words no doubt contain a reference to the merciful dealing with the Prophet's opponents, the real significance is that the Prophet's advent will prove a mercy not only to the Arabs by making them a foremost nation in the world, but to the whole of humanity. The Prophet's being a mercy to the *'alamîn*, or *all nations* of the world, is to show that ultimately all nations will be received into the Divine mercy which was manifested through him. Already the teachings of the Qur'ân have not only benefited its followers, but even those who still reject its message, for, notwithstanding their rejection of it, they have accepted many of its principles.